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Different Levels of Anxiety Among Chinese EFL learners in Malaysian Public Universities

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate different levels and types of anxiety among Chinese EFL learners studying at one of the public universities in Malaysia. The participants of this research consisted of 50 students altogether who are studying in University of Malaya, including 25 males and 25 females. English Learning Anxiety Survey (ELAS) is used for collection data, which is adopted from Lee (2011). The data was then analyzed by using descriptive statistics and comparative statistics. The findings reviewed that Chinese EFL learners experienced three categories of anxiety, that is, communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The findings also show that there is significant relationship between gender and English language learning anxiety.

Key words: Anxiety; Language learning; Chinese EFL learners

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INTRODUCTION

It is universally acknowledged that English is used as one of the most common medium languages in many international occasions, such as academic conferences, journal publications, and airport broadcasting. It, thus, becomes increasingly important to acquire the skills of English communication. However, in the learning process, English

learners usually experience a feeling of anxiety when they learn to speak English. Actually, anxiety is an emotion that affects every person, and many factors can lead to a person to experience a certain kind feeling of anxiety. However, it has caused many arguments about defining what anxiety is. The anxiety that this present study focus on is not anxiety in psychology but anxiety arising from English language learning. Anxiety of learners has become a topic of discussion in ESL/EFL studies in that it is believed to be a very important variable which can influence the learning process. It is, thus, of great importance to study the role of second/foreign language anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1984 and 1994) confirmed that foreign language anxiety can affect every stage of language learning: input, processing, output. Anxiety in the stage of input refers to the fear of learners experienced when they came across a new word, phrase, or sentence in a foreign language for the first time. So people with higher anxiety seem impossible for them to focus on learning. During processing, the level of anxiety depends on the difficulty of the learning tasks, so the easier the learning tasks, the less influence the anxiety has. Anxiety at the output stage, the last step of learning process, involves that the learner may experience some certain kind of worry when they are asked to reproduce what they learnt previously.

In addition, Tasnimi (2009) explained that there are two important anxiety distinctions. The first type of anxiety is beneficial /facilitating, while the second type anxiety was inhibiting/debilitating. The former offers motivation for learners to spare their no efforts to study a new topic and encourage students to do their utmost to overcome the anxieties from it. On the contrary, the latter type of anxiety causes learners to avoid the learning task in order to get rid of the source of anxiety. Turner (1977, p.226) proved that “anxiety is more likely to hinder than to facilitate the process of learning and it can be seen to impair performance at both school and university level.”

A. Statement of Problem

Foreign language anxiety is a factor that affects the learning process of learners, especially during which the attitude of the students and the performance of language learning (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Cheng, 1998). For EFL learners, if they cannot get rid of anxiety, which to a great extent will affect their learning process. Therefore, it is always a challenge for getting students in a welcoming and safe environment of learning English that most EFL teachers face. So much more studies need to be done about English language anxiety.

B. Purpose and Objectives and Questions

The main purpose of this research is set for exploring undergraduate students' anxiety from English learning across communication anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation anxiety. To achieve the purpose of this present study, four research questions are identified:

a) Do the Chinese EFL learners experience English language learning anxiety through three categories: test anxiety, communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation anxiety?

b) Is there any significant relationship between gender and English language learning anxiety?

C. Significance of the Study

This study will provide an elaborate statement on the various significances of the research given by language learners, English teachers and school authorities. Although there are quite enough amount previous studies which have been done about anxiety in the field of psychology, but little work relates to anxiety from a new perspective with reference to the gender and majors. Furthermore, the importance and value of this study arise from the significance of a theoretical model and an alternative approach for future studies.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

For many years, English teachers and educational researchers have already realized that learning a new language is a highly demanding task, which is normal for individuals to experience a certain kind of anxiety. So many previous studies were conducted about anxiety.

Bailey (1983) analyzed the diaries of 11 students and got the result that competitiveness can lead to anxiety for some learners. He discovered that learners have the propensity to surpass others in order to get better feedback from teachers concerning their competence, performance and progress. The results also indicate that tests and the relationship between learners and teachers also resulted in anxiety of the language learners. Na (2007) studied 115 Chinese second-year high school students and the data suggested, through the use of questionnaire and an achievement test, that those learners experience high level of anxiety in learning English. She found, specially, that female students show lower level of anxiety in English

learning than male participants. What is more, she found out that it inhibits the language learning process and affects the achievements because of the high level of anxiety. In 1994, MacIntyre and Gardner carried out a study which involved 97 participants who are learning French in college, and found that it is more difficult for college students to have a normal performance in the classroom because of the feelings of anxiety. They also discovered that students have high level of anxiety tend to underestimate their abilities of English language learning.

In relation to MacIntyre and Gardner's study, Williams and Andrade (2008) surveyed 243 Japanese students among four different universities in Japan and the findings suggested that teachers and classmates are highly related to students' anxieties. Von Worde (2003) carried out a survey through interviews, that when students were required to describe their feelings toward second language learning, some students explained with examples how anxiety gave rise to frustration and anger. For anyone who has been stressed, whether it is stress provoked by an important assignment, or acquiring a new language, it is easy to see how frustration and anger towards the task at hand can hinder progress.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Horwitz & Cope (1986, p.127) confirming that language learning anxiety relates to academic performance evaluation, described three types of language learning anxiety: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

2.1 Communication Anxiety

Spoken language plays an essential role in language learning for language learners. So the spoken proficiency of target language affects the learning process. Having problem in expressing themselves and making themselves understood being all representations of communication apprehension. This kind of language learning anxiety resulted from learners' personal background, which will make the learners to keep silent in the classroom.

2.2 Test Anxiety

Test anxiety derived from a fear of failure. It relates conversely to self-esteem of the learners and also closely relates to fears of getting some negative evaluations.

2.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of evaluation is described as the fear of others' evaluations. This may cause the learners to try to avoid the evaluative situations and also to get rid of the negative evaluation. It incorporates the fear from the English classroom where learning tasks, teaching method of the teachers and even pressure from classmates may result in learner's anxieties.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The target participants for this study were Chinese postgraduate students who are studying in the University of Malaya. There were 50 students altogether, including 25 boys and 25 girls and most of whom are from faculty of language and linguistics. All of them have been learning English for at least five years. 50 questionnaires were distributed with the returned rate of 100%. Therefore, a total of 50 valid questionnaires were used in the formal investigation.

3.2 Setting

The main library, in the University of Malaya, is one of the most famous public universities in Malaysia. The reason why the researcher chose library is that most students tend to study at library not only the target group (Chinese students) but also students from many other countries.

3.3 Instrument

The instrument in this study used to collect data is adopted from the English Learning Anxiety Survey (ELAS) designed by Lee (2011). This questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is the general information of the participants, and second part contains 32 Likert items used a 4-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, which is used to assess the level of three types of anxiety the students experience. More specifically, “strongly disagree” was calculated as 4 points, “agree” as 3 points, “disagree” as 2 points, and “strongly disagree” as 1 point. The level of anxiety the participants experience is determined by the total points they got, that is, the higher, the more anxious.

Table 1
English Learning Anxiety Survey

Part 1 general information	Gender	
	Major	
	Learning duration	
Part 2 self-reported English learning anxiety	Communication anxiety	13 items
	Test anxiety	9 items
	Fear of evaluation anxiety	10 items

Table 2
The Distribution of the Types of Anxiety

Types of anxiety	Sum of items	No.
Communication anxiety	13	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13
Test anxiety	9	14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22
Fear of evaluation anxiety	10	23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32

3.4 Data Analysis

Firstly, The data was then analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The range and means for each item and each type of anxiety to obtain a better understanding of the general view of participants' anxiety and to describe the overall levels of anxiety of the participants. Secondly, calculate the range and means of males, females respectively to compare the different levels of anxiety between males and females.

4. FINDINGS AND STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ANXIETY

The findings reveal that the Chinese EFL speakers (both males and females) generally experienced a feeling of anxiety in learning English language among these three categories: communication anxiety ($M=2.15$), test anxiety ($M=2.50$) and fear of evaluation anxiety ($M=2.35$). Among these three categories, fear of evaluation is the lowest level of anxiety experienced by participants, which indicates that Chinese EFL learners usually have the feeling of anxiety when they are requested to communication or attend a test. As for the evaluation from others, they do have a certain level of anxiety but not that high compared to the other two types (see Table 3).

Table 3
Range and Mean Levels of Anxiety Among Both Genders

Category	Range	Mean
Communication anxiety	1.846-3.769	2.515
Test anxiety	1.778-3.333	2.505
Fear of evaluation anxiety	1.444-3.000	2.359

The findings also show that female Chinese students ($M=2.56$) experience a higher level anxiety than male participants ($M=2.3$) on the whole and female learners represent higher level of anxiety than males among each category, especially, fear of evaluation. The highest level anxiety of female students is fear of evaluation anxiety, while, for male students, communication anxiety and test anxiety make up the higher score than fear of evaluation among these three categories (see Table 4).

Table 4
Mean Levels of Anxiety Among Males Compared to Females

Category	Male	Female
Communication anxiety	2.379	2.566
Test anxiety	2.425	2.539
Fear of evaluation anxiety	2.290	2.602
Total	2.370	2.569

Since Chinese EFL learners experience anxiety, it is important to introduce some strategies to reduce the levels of anxiety. Previous studies related to language anxiety have suggested a variety of techniques to reduce or successfully cope with language anxiety in academic settings. Here the researcher listed some effective strategies to reduce anxiety.

- Make the classroom environment less formal and more friendly (Hembree, 1988)
- Students are taught to be relaxed (Mejias et al., 1991, p.97)
- Providing non-threatening and supportive instructional environments (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999)
- Group work allow anxious students additional time to practice (von Worde, 2003)

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings indicated that the Chinese EFL learners are experiencing different levels of language anxiety in learning English in University of Malay. Among these three types of anxiety, fear of evaluation got the lowest scores by participants, which is consistent with Lee's (2011) findings, although the number of participants are less.

Language anxiety is a universal phenomenon, especially among the second/foreign language learning population. According to the results, the research questions first posed have been answered that Chinese students in the University of Malaya feel different levels of anxiety, especially in communication anxiety and test anxiety. The second research question also finds the answer based on the results that females learner experienced higher level of anxiety than male participants. The results are both consistent with previous researches (Lee, 2011) and contrary to the previous studies (Na, 2007). That is due to the limitation of this research: (a) The number of participants is small. (b) Not differentiating undergraduate from postgraduate learners. (c) Low diversity of students from different majors. Further study can look at larger number of participants and investigate anxiety among different majors.

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Online Meaning Construction of Chinese Net Words From Japanese: On the Basis of Conceptual Blending Theory

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Abstract

From the perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory, this paper tries to analyze the online meaning construction of Chinese net words from Japanese by showing the powerful explanation of the three kinds network of blending—single-scope network, double-scope network and multiple network. When understanding Chinese net words from Japanese, Chinese netizens tend to use their existing knowledge, resulting in different interpreting from Japanese net words. Subject to social and cultural factors, deviations of meaning construction come into being in the context of Chinese and Japanese. This paper may facilitate Chinese-Japanese exchange and strengthen Chinese people's understanding of Chinese language and culture at the same time.

Key words: Chinese net words; Japanese; Meaning construction; Conceptual blending

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INTRODUCTION

The cyber times provides a platform for net words and with the enhancement of cultural communication,

loanwords in Chinese net words have received extensive attention. Chinese and Japanese belong to Chinese Character Cultural Sphere, and Japanese written systems, especially kanji words are borrowed from Chinese characters. However, those characters in Japan change morphologically or semantically, some become very popular expressions in Japan and even return to China, becoming prevalent net words. For example, words like *meng* (萌), *sennü* (森女), *yujie* (御姐) are prevalent on BBSs, chattering rooms, weibo or news on Chinese Internet. The previous studies of net language are developing from description to interpretation, which have received a lot of achievements. However, there still exist some limitations. Although some scholars have explored net language in the perspective of society, psychology and cognition, such studies mostly still stay on the surface explanation and classification, rather than the deep, systematic and comprehensive interpretation of meaning construction. Conceptual Blending Theory developed and elaborated on by Fauconnier and Turner (1997, 1998, and 2002), which is a general cognitive operation used to on-line meaning construction. This thesis tries to reveal the online meaning construction of Chinese net words from Japanese by showing how single-scope, double scope and multiple networks are employed in the analysis and summarize the commonness of cognitive regularities of human beings.

1. SINGLE-SCOPE NETWORK

1.1 Meaning Construction of *Zhai* (宅)

The single-scope network has two input spaces with different frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. Single-scope network is the prototype of highly conventional source-target metaphor. As metaphor, the input framing the blend is the source, and the input which is the focus of understanding is the target. The meaning

construction of Chinese net word *zhai* (宅) is an example. Chinese net word *zhai* (宅) is very different from Japanese net word *otaku* (御宅). However, the generation of new

meaning of Chinese character *zhai* (宅) is influenced by Japanese word. It is operated under the mechanism of conceptual blending, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

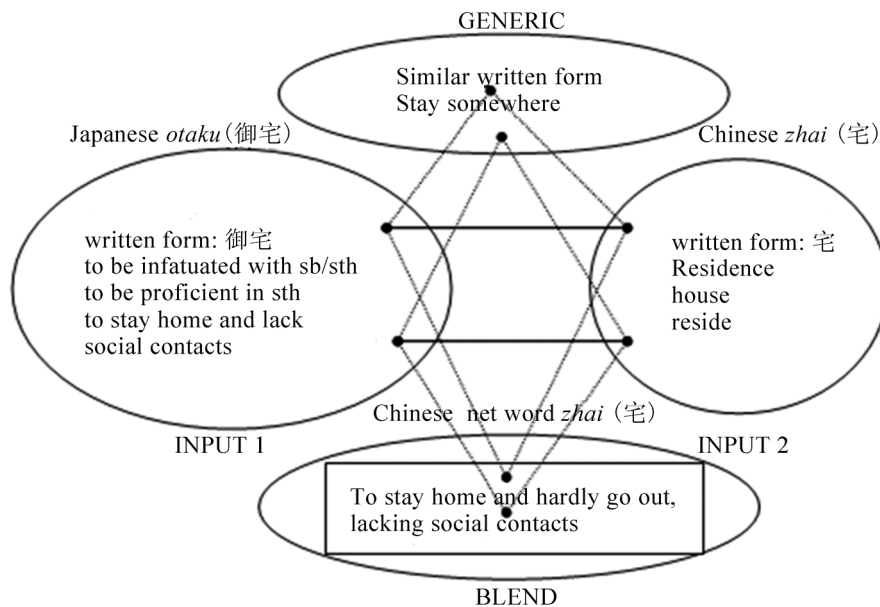


Figure 1
Single-Scope Mapping of *Zhai* (宅)

In the blending net above, Japanese *otaku* (御宅) is Input 1 and Chinese character *zhai* (宅) is Input 2. The similar elements are projected into generic space, which contains the shared abstract structure of those two input spaces. Those similar elements are further projected into blending space. The two input spaces can also project elements into the blending space. The blending space is the central space of the conceptual blending network, which receives the semantic projection from input spaces. The written form of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) and Chinese *zhai* (宅) and their meaning “staying home” are related and enter the blending space, and generate the emergent structure. There are three processes in such structure: composition, completion and elaboration. Composition makes the written form and meanings of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) and Chinese *zhai* (宅) associated; in the process of completion, Chinese character *zhai* (宅) picks the meaning of “staying home and hardly go out”; in the process of elaboration, Chinese character *zhai* (宅) gets its other functions. For example, *zhai* (宅) is a noun in *azhai* (阿宅), *zhairé* (宅热), *zhaiishishang* (宅时尚); an adjective in *zhaiqing* (宅青), *zhainan* (宅男), *zhainü* (宅女), *henzhai* (很宅) and a verb in *zhaiyajia* (宅在家), *zhaiyiqi* (宅一起). Generated in different cultural backgrounds, the semantic feature “mania, nerd” of Japanese *otaku* (御宅) is not projected into the blending space, which leads to the different understandings on the same character “宅” of Chinese and Japanese netizens.

1.2 Meaning Construction of *Meng* (萌)

The cognitive mechanism of Chinese net word *meng* (萌) can be also interpreted by a single-scope network. As there is the character *meng* (萌), standing for bud, Chinese netizens tend to interpret it at its face value without real understanding, and hold that it refers to lovely and little girl. Therefore, Chinese *meng* (萌) gives prominence to the meaning of “lovely and immature” and diverges with Japanese. It is strongly believed that when Chinese culture meets Japanese Otaku Subculture, Chinese netizens have their own cognitive process and such process that selectively borrowing certain semantic components into Chinese character *meng* (萌) can be explained by a single-scope network in Figure 2.

Input 1 is Japanese net word *moe* (萌え) and Input 2 is Chinese character *meng* (萌). Elements in those two spaces are selectively projected into the blending space and via composition (similar in written form and sound), completion (to show adoration towards lovely and young girl) and elaboration (to show adoration towards any lovely and little things, or the features of those things), Chinese character *meng* (萌) generates new meanings.

In the process of blending, apart from the similar pronunciation and written form, the semantic feature “adoration towards lovely young girl” in Japanese *moe* (萌え) and the basic meaning “tender and immature” of Chinese character *meng* (萌) are associated, which activates Chinese netizens’ association of the meaning of Japanese *moe* (萌え). Otaku are male and they are

generally attracted by beautiful and young female characters, while the prominent meaning of Chinese *meng* (萌) is “tender and immature”, Chinese netizens therefore hold that “beautiful girls are pure, naïve and young”. They further extend its function that a thing no matter virtual or real, as it is lovely and little, can be marked as *meng* (萌). In the process of conceptual blending, Chinese netizens

filter the semantic features of Japanese *moe* (萌え). The meaning “adoration and complex” of Japanese *moe* (萌え) does not enter the blending space, on the contrary, most Chinese original meaning of *meng* (萌) enter it and thus this character becomes infrequent Japanese-originated words which have Chinese characteristics (Bai & Wang, 2014).

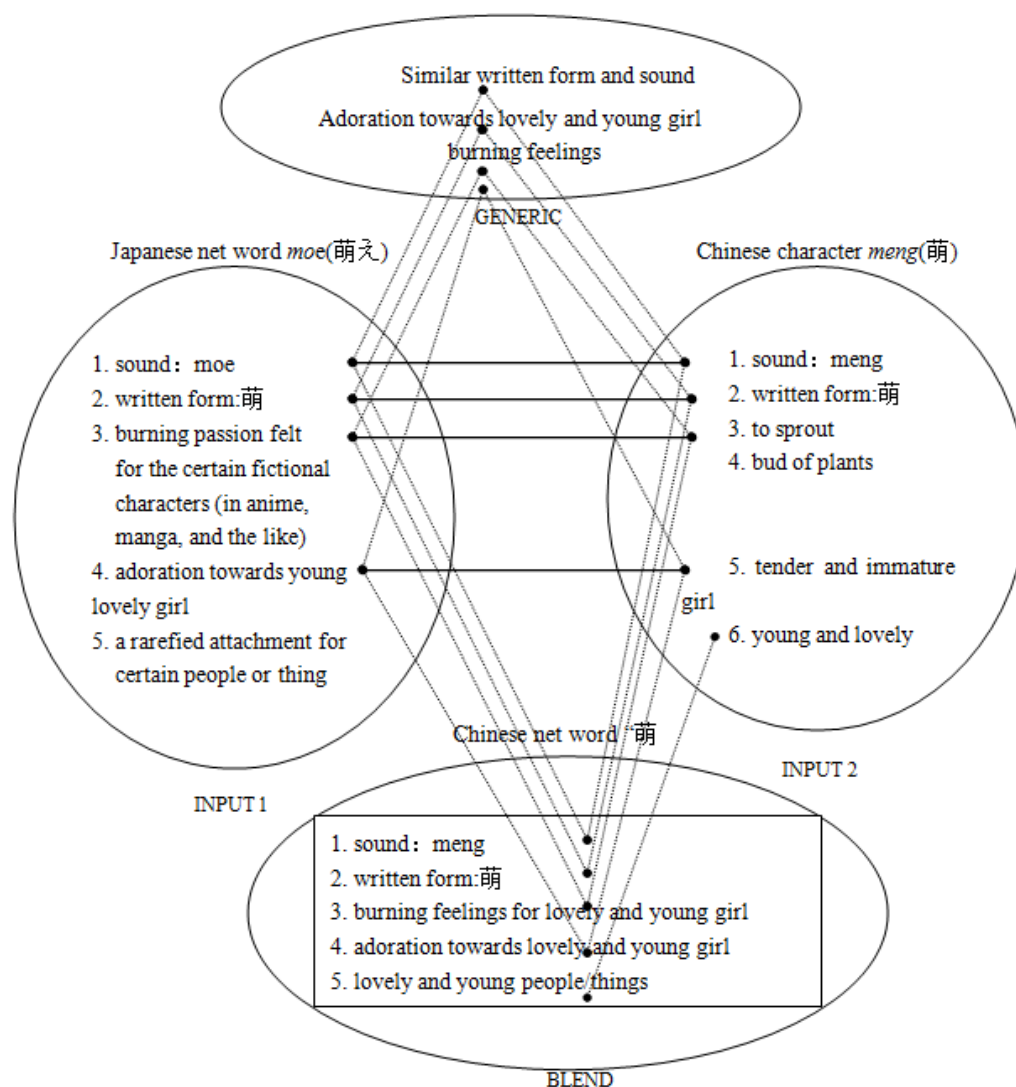


Figure 2
Single-Scope Mapping of Meng (萌)

2. DOUBLE-SCOPE NETWORK

2.1 Meaning Construction of *Dushe* (毒舌)

A double-scope network has distinct organizing frames and both organizing frames contribute to the blend. The sharp differences between the two distinct frames offer the possibility of rich clashes, and such clashes offer challenges to the imagination and make the blend highly creative (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The word *dushe* (毒舌) is an example. The two inputs have distinct

frames: the concept of poison and someone’s language style. What is worth to mention is that input 2 is a result of metaphorical mapping between the human organ tongue and human’s language style. The frame in the blend draws from the frame of poison “unpleasant smell, vomit, uncomfortable, deleterious to health” as well as the frame of one’s language style “sharp, feeling of vomiting, uncomfortable, difficult to accept”. In the blend, an emergent structure “someone speaks sharply which makes others feel as poisoned” is generated. So we can see that

both of the inputs make contributions to the blending and the clashes between the two inputs will facilitate the

novelty of meaning construction other than blocking the construction. This network is illustrated in Figure 3.

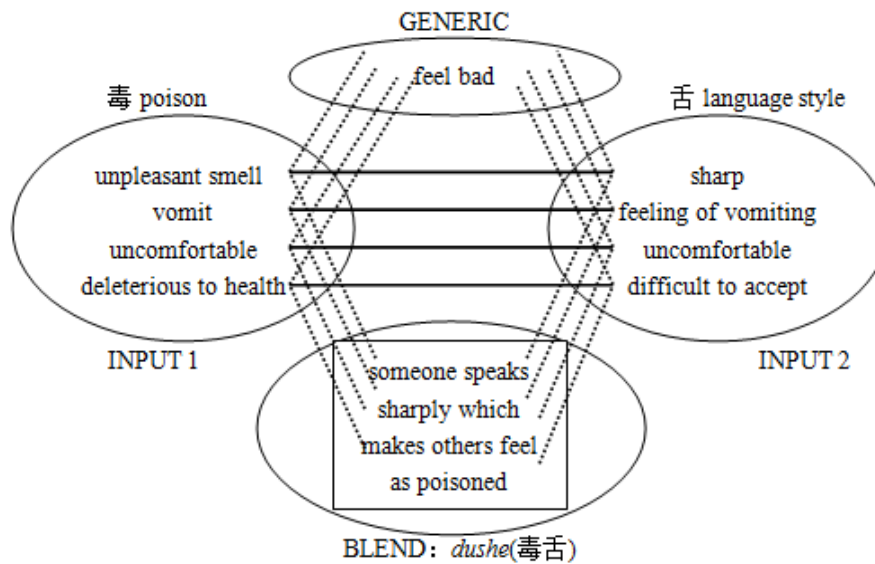


Figure 3
Double-Scope Mapping of *Dushe*(毒舌)

2.2 Meaning Construction of *Fuhei* (腹黑)

The meaning construction of *fuhei* (腹黑) is also a double-scope blending. firstly, we have to mention the meaning construction of the word *fu* (腹), which undergoes a double-scope blending. There are two input spaces having their distinct frames: HUMAN space, which contains internal and external aspects of human beings, and the SPACE mental space, which contains the concepts of IN and OUT. Element “internal aspects: stomach, belly, bowels, heart, thought, natural disposition, philosophy, values; external aspects: appearance, height, behavior, manners, posture” in HUMAN space and “INTERNAL (hidden, invisible and imperceptible) and EXTERNAL (exposed, visible and perceptible)” in SPACE space are related and projected to the generic space, and further projected to the blend, where an emergent structure is generated. The emergent meaning of *fu* (腹) is “someone’s thought, natural disposition, philosophy, values which are opposite to his or her exterior characteristics such as appearance, height, behavior, manners, posture”. Such meanings cannot be found in any of the two input spaces, and they are the results of composition, completion and elaboration. Two inputs both contribute to the blending.

Now, let us see the blending of *fuhei* (腹黑). Input 1 is the abstract concept of *fu* (腹) and Input 2 is the cultural concept of the color black *hei* (黑) (constructed metaphorically in mappings between color domain and cultural model domain). The blend selects elements “thought, natural, disposition, philosophy, values, opposite to one’s exterior characteristics” in Input 1 and “dirty, hidden, secretive, ugly, evil” in Input

2 to compose a new relation: Someone’s stomach is black. The emergent structure continues to complete such relationship, and the relation is read as “someone is wicked, evil-minded, shrewd and deep”, and the elaboration operation adds to the meaning “someone behaves kindly but wicked, shrewd in his mind”. So the emergent meanings are generated based on the two inputs’ contributions to the blend, which is shown in Figure 4.

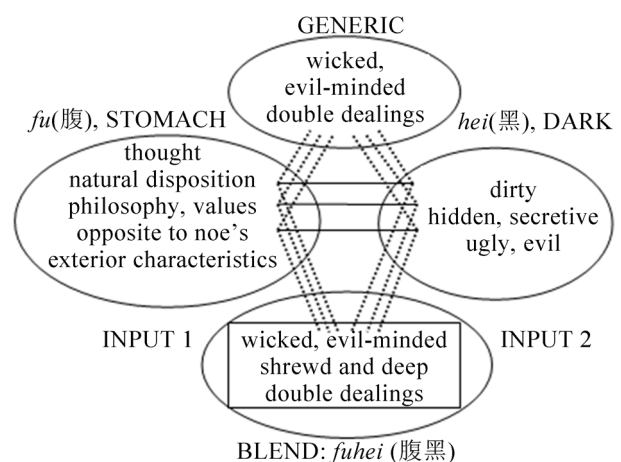


Figure 4
Double-Scope Mapping of *Fuhei* (腹黑)

3. MULTIPLE NETWORK

It is also worth to mention that sometimes there are more than two inputs in integration network and blends can also function as inputs for further blending, this kind of blending is called multiple blending (Evans & Green,